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KLIPSUN

WAKE — SPRING 2020





PHOTO October Yates

For the Reader,

The lake is silent on a cool spring morning. As a thick mist rises from the water's glassy surface, there is a harsh rumble, and a white speedboat rushes through. All that remains, when the buzz fades to an empty echo, is a white-capped trail, rippling, rippling, gone.

While the wake of one boat disappears as quickly as it comes into existence, add one, two or 50 more to the mix and, well... just imagine the insurmountable waves. It is not difficult to picture this familiar wake. But to recognize this metaphor on a greater human scale is another story.

As members of Generation Z, we are quite literally capsized in the middle of this body of water, shouting, as well as we can, to be heard. The results of human disregard for nature and humanity alike have thrust us into a social and environmental crisis with no tangible solution. But still, we try. Because the consequence of silence is ruin.

As Greta Thunberg, one of the foremost members of our generation has said, "This is not the time and place for dreams. This is the time to wake up."

These pages are filled with many hard truths and necessary lessons, alongside stories of metamorphosis, peace and unbridled joy. For within this dichotomy, we may hope to find the answers we so desperately seek.

These are the words we have to offer you, generations of the past, present and future. Take them as you will.

Truly,

Zoe Deal

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→ Rachel Walsh scrolls through social media app TikTok on the Communications Lawn at Western on Feb. 10, 2020.



Okay, Zoomer.

STORY John 'Elias' Olson | PHOTOS Christa Yaranon

Between the latest TikTok dance and #DogsOfTikTok, Gen Z responds to current events with their same firebrand humor.

ASK ANY COLLEGE STUDENT if they've heard of TikTok and chances are they fall into one of three camps. Maybe they downloaded it as a joke—and now they can't put it down. Maybe, they've seen one of the countless reposts of popular TikToks to Twitter. Or most tragically, perhaps they're still in denial about the death of Vine.

Rachel Walsh, a fourth-year marketing student at Western Washington University, falls into that first camp; she now has 42,300 followers.

"My friend Thomas and I were in this group chat where we shared memes back and forth," Walsh said. "I downloaded the app after the fifth TikTok that got sent—the next thing I knew five hours had passed."

Thomas Dunn, a fourth-year political science major and Walsh's friend, had a similar introduction to the viral app. TikTok showed him a slate of popular creators and trending hashtags and eventually, the app's algorithm caught on to what he liked. It quickly became a habit to check 'what's new today,' Dunn said.

TikTok, a social media platform from China, follows a style similar to the late Vine, letting users record short videos of themselves with voice filters and enough pre-recorded samples for all future viral dance trends.

"A lot of the content is just straight-up cringey, and I think the biggest barrier to entry is the humor," Walsh said. "A lot of people think it's stupid, but you just have to spend time learning the type of humor and what's expected."

While Walsh calls the humor "cringey"—second-hand embarrassment you can't help grimacing at—she said it's only really noticeable if you don't identify with the community it was made for. Theater kids, the comedy commu-

nity and dance community all call TikTok home, Walsh said. But the thing most of them have in common? They're all a part of Gen Z.

"I went through the five stages of grief before I came to terms with being Gen Z," Walsh said.

Gen Z—or Zoomers—are people born between 1996 and 2010. Currently, they're estimated to make up 82 million US consumers. But for TikTok, Zoomers are the primary user base, making up almost half of their 500 million users.

"I went through the five stages of grief before I came to terms with being Gen Z," Walsh said. "I was born in 1998 and grew up identifying with Millennials. I eventually had to realize that I was at the start of a new generation."

Members of Gen Z have become the new Millennials in terms of receiving guff about their generation from anyone over the age of 30 (see "Okay, Boomer" from The New York Times). According to Pew Research, this might be because Gen Z and Millennials share many of the same progressive views and concerns about the state of the world. But there are still significant distinctions.

"The biggest difference I see between Gen Z and Millennials is, again, our sense of humor," Walsh said. "We make light of situations, more so than Millennials. We also tend to jump on new technology faster—like TikTok."

Stephanie Gomez, an assistant professor of media studies

at Western, agrees. She believes that this new sense of humor is created by the current landscape of social media. Furthermore, Gomez says that Zoomers tend to be more open with their emotions and mental health and that can make their coping mechanisms appear very different from previous generations.

“I think of shows like South Park and Family Guy—taking really horrifying or scary topics and taking it to the absurd,” Gomez said. “Now with social media, we’re the producers and consumers of content. If you mix in the shock value of TV shows Gen Z grew up with and add some nihilism, you get Gen Z humor.”

“It’s like, I’m not going to pay my student loans if the world is going to end soon,” Dunn said.

According to Dunn, Gen Z is truly nihilistic and care-free. But at the same time, he says, Gen Z is often more caring and empathetic toward topics of race, gender and LGBTQ+ rights.

As such, most TikToks you’ll find reflect this mindset in 60-second-or-less reactions.

For example, after the killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani authorized by President Donald Trump, fear erupted about a potential war between the U.S. and Iran. Hashtags like “#WWIII” accompanied TikTok videos of young women making jokes about avoiding the draft by sticking to ‘traditional values’ of women as homemakers.

“When TikToks go viral, it’s usually because they’re relatable,” Dunn said. “People will also comment and engage more if there’s an element of shock value, too.”

Recently, TikTok users also made light of the Trump impeachment trial. Queer TikTok users made “Who’s cabin are you in?” videos about the potential for “Mike Pence Summer Camps” if President Trump was removed from office. This is in reference to allegations of Pence’s financial support of institutions to “help people ‘change their sexual behavior.’”

“It’s like, I’m not going to pay my student loans if the world is going to end soon,” Dunn said.

Gomez doesn’t think it’s an accident that Gen Z parodies, satirizes and deals with the scary stuff through hyperbole. According to her, it’s only natural that they form a community where reacting to the world is a sort of coping mechanism.

Some on Twitter have accused TikTok users of being insensitive. But Gomez pushes back, citing critical media theory, which maintains that shock value is the only way to change something.

“Essentially, people have to be shocked out of their complacency to recognize something is as bad as it is,” Gomez said. “When nothing makes sense and everything is burning around you, the only solution is to shock people just enough to wake them up.”

To her, people criticizing Gen Z for their humor isn’t helpful. Maybe the question isn’t why Gen Z is doing this, but why not? To creators like Walsh, there’s a fine line to be toed when making these kinds of reactionary TikToks.

“I don’t think it’ll ever be totally okay to make light of incredibly grave situations, even though I still watch and like them,” Walsh said. “I mainly resonate with the humor, but don’t fully know how to justify it.”

“The only solution is to shock people just enough to wake them up.”

She also recognizes that there’s a pressure to follow and capitalize on trends to go viral—which might be a reason why #WWIII or impeachment videos make it to viral status. For her, the challenge of succeeding on TikTok has been finding her niche.

“I mostly followed trends and copied them,” she said. “Eventually I learned that the easiest way was to just be myself—my videos mostly talk about my own experience, and it’ll resonate with people who can relate to me.”

This drive to go viral makes sense, Gomez says. Using current events just makes it more relatable and thus, easier. TikTok still ranks highly in the Top 10 apps on both iOS and the Google Play Store four years after its release. It’s also been incredibly successful as an advertising platform, making it one of the tech world’s best returns on investment for advertising. Dunn, who’s gone viral more than once, doesn’t share the same optimism.

“I think TikToks will lose that new car smell,” Dunn said. “Because it seems a lot easier for TikToks to go viral and users to get lots of followers, I don’t think most people are going to remember the people they follow if the app dies.”

To Gomez, it’s hard to tell where mass media is headed next simply because the jumps between technologies keep getting shorter—from film and radio to TV and the internet, and now social media. But she also has a more hopeful outlook compared to her Gen Z students.

“I’ve always had a soft spot for Gen Z; they’re so much more aware and empathetic,” Gomez said. “People have always clutched their pearls when new technology comes out. To an extent, it can change culture for the worse, but in many ways, it opens up new opportunities —TikTok simply represents an outlet and place to find community for Gen Z.”



↳ Xavier and Halilah touch the shore of Bellingham Bay as mentor Jillian Whitehill supervises over them.

Waking up Whatcom Youth

STORY MacKenzie Dexter | PHOTOS Christa Yaranon

Local environmental and educational programs come together to find innovative ways to teach children about climate change.

AFTER THE LAST BELL RINGS at Alderwood Elementary School, a swarm of kids pull on their rain boots, put on their jackets and follow a line to the nearest park. It's a weekly tradition: Two hours each Wednesday are spent out in nature. A rainbow of little boots splash into puddles from the morning rain. Laughing children play house, climb trees and bicker over who gets the best branch. For Wild Whatcom's after-school program, Neighborhood Nature, the primary goal is for children to engage with the environment around them.

Neighborhood Nature is a local response to a vast body of research on American children and technology. A 2018 study found that the average kid in America looks at a screen for more than seven hours a day—spending only

four to seven minutes of playtime outside.

Giving kids the time to explore the outdoors not only lets them release their energy, but it also allows them to learn and question the world they live in, said Hannah Newell, school program manager for Wild Whatcom.

"Rain or shine, we go outside for two hours and just kind of feed off of their energy with the structure of giving them the chance to explore nearby nature," Newell said, looking out fondly at a field of playing children. "So we always have the ability to walk to a park or a forested area and [give] them games to play, opportunities to connect."

Newell said that an important part of Neighborhood Nature is being conscious of the outdoors and making sure kids observe the land in their own way.



↳ Kids from Neighborhood Nature peer at Bellingham Bay from the Bellingham Boardwalk on Feb. 20, 2020.

“We talk a lot about how you can connect with nature and how it looks different for everybody,” Newell said. “Someone might be really into birds, someone might be really into mushrooms and insects where someone might just really want to move their bodies and play games outside. But [in] each of those ways that we interact with the natural world, we do have an impact.”

Through Wild Whatcom’s other programs, such as Explorers Club and EdVenture, kids receive lessons about minimizing negative impacts on the environment. In each session, adult mentors ask the children questions to promote curiosity and reflection. These questions often involve reflecting on how the land looks different from their last visit or how they could leave the area looking better than before. Newell said that they will assign “Earth keepers” to assess the area and make sure the group doesn’t leave anything behind, like picking up a wrapper dropped by a peer.

While the questions they ask the kids often receive insightful responses, Newell said the best part of her job is engaging with the questions the kids ask in return, including one student’s question about plant life.

“We’re sitting on this grass and [a student] goes, ‘You know, we’ve been injuring plants all day long and I wonder how this grass feels about getting cut every single day,’” Newell said.

The student continued by pondering whether the scent of fresh-cut grass is actually the grass sending out distress signals.

Although Wild Whatcom has created programs for students and schools to interact with the environment, there

remains a looming question of how to teach children about the climate crisis in the classroom.

“We’re sitting on this grass and [a student] goes, ‘You know, we’ve been injuring plants all day long and I wonder how this grass feels about getting cut every single day,’” Newell said.

While roughly 86% of teachers and 80% of parents support climate change curriculum, the question becomes: How do we even begin?

Licia Sahagun, executive director for Wild Whatcom, said that while discussions about climate change can be daunting, they are important conversations to have with adults and kids.

“We’re willing to have hard conversations,” Sahagun said.

As they gather pieces of bark, rocks and leaves at Fisher Elementary School in February, a group of 40 teachers become the students. Educators from across seven school districts spent their Saturday participating in ClimeTime, a training session on how to incorporate the basics of climate science and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) into their everyday teaching.

Organizations like RE Sources, Common Threads and Wild Whatcom come together to teach the basics of cli-

mate science. According to a survey taken upon arrival, 69% of educators are not teaching climate science because they don't believe they have adequate knowledge of the topic to do so.

The NGSS grant was installed in 2018–19, implemented by Gov. Jay Inslee, and facilitated by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and UW Institute for Science & Math Education. The Washington State Legislature allocated \$4 million to Educational Service Districts and community organizations to teach Washington state educators about NGSS and climate science. The goal is for teachers to be able to align their regular lessons with what they've learned in the training. It will give them the tools to answer hard questions students may have in an engaging and proactive way.

"A lot of times when we talk about climate science, it's like all these things around the world are happening, but [this program looks at] what's actually happening right in your area that you can actually have a direct effect on it," Newell said.

The knowledge around climate science takes place at different levels, even with teachers. However, the training is centered around the basics, such as the human impact on the carbon cycle.

At these trainings, teachers often participate in the activities designed for their students. During a January session, teams of teachers were assigned different environments, such as oceans and lakes, and taught how carbon moves through the air with a game.

Teachers were also asked to explain climate science in 10 words or less, as a way to simplify definitions and be conscious of how important language is, especially when it comes to complex topics. They were then asked to go around the room and share their words with each other. Some responses included, "We live in balance," and "We change the climate, it changes us."

"[It's about] letting them know that it's okay not to know," said Liz Manz. "We can go out and try to find the answers."

Jenna Deane, program manager of Common Threads Farm, said for many teachers, it's hard to incorporate climate science into their busy schedules and lesson plans. ClimeTime is a way to teach and encourage educators to find a way to incorporate the conversation inside and outside the classroom.

Liz Manz, a third-grade teacher at Irene Reither Elementary School explained how she approaches tough



↳ Eloise Brown holds up a shell from Boulevard Park – a memento from a day spent connecting with the outdoors.

questions her students may ask while they're at school. "[It's about] letting them know that it's okay not to know," Manz said. "We can go out and try to find the answers."

Glenn DePeralta, another third-grade teacher at Irene Reither, said that his students will ask him to search questions that they have on Google.

"They already know how to find information, they just need me to help them navigate," DePeralta said. "Sometimes if I don't know something I'll say, 'Well, how can we find out?'"

DePeralta said that the consciousness of our world and problems is being implemented through news, conversations and the internet. Students just need help to understand and process it.

"Really, climate change is going to affect everything," Deane said. "So there is an angle into whatever topic you're teaching about to bring that in. I hope that they take away that it is an approachable subject."

With such a positive reaction, trainings and waitlists are filling up, Newell said, and it's clear that change is wanted and people are eager to learn.

"It's their world now," Deane said. "[Climate change] will only continue to be a conversation that they should be part of as they mature into adults. It's going to be up to them to continue to try to find solutions to adapt to whatever changes we experience in whatever part of the world we're in."



A Trip to Remember

STORY Anonymous | ILLUSTRATIONS Rachel Rothberg

My journey with psychedelics, and how they are reasserting their position as effective treatment for mental illness in the scientific community.

I CHOREOGRAPH DANCES on my arms with my fingers, hugging myself gently, but with purpose. My breaths are soft. Each one feels important. My skin is inorganic, soft fabric stretched over a sturdy frame. When I close my eyes, I see a universe of stars exploding, their particles extending in geometric patterns. When I open my eyes, my room holds me in shades of lilac and pastel pink.

“I love you,” I whisper to myself, as if it’s my own little secret. For the first time in a long time, I am confident in those three words. Outside, the emerald green of the trees is especially vibrant. The sky is an arresting blue. So crisp and clean and detailed; it’s like I’m wearing glasses, only these glasses aren’t prescription.

They’re psilocybin mushrooms, and I’m four hours deep in a psychedelic trip.

I began taking mushrooms recreationally in 2017, partly due to pressure from my friends and partly due to rampant curiosity. My first trip was mild and uneventful; I didn’t hallucinate, so I was determined to try again.

When I took them a few months later, I was hit with an uncontrollable fit of laughter and a startlingly fast descent into visual distortions. I could tell I was coming up by the urgent and bubbly sensation in my stomach. I remember asking my roommate if her hot pink blanket was on fire, and when I went to the bathroom, the flamingos on our hand towel came to life and strode off.

As the hours dripped on, I melted into the floor, then onto my roof, then into my friends. I named curious things I saw like a child would, simply and innocently. When a man walked through the alley with a musical set of keys attached to his utility belt, I named him Mr. Jingly Jangs.

As I experimented more often, I settled into the overwhelming and recurring feeling of euphoria and absolute clarity.

When a man walked through the alley with a musical set of keys attached to his utility belt, I named him Mr. Jingly Jangs.

I live with generalized anxiety and panic disorder. Though I take medication to manage my symptoms, sometimes I’m struck with untriggered bouts of intense panic, complete with heart palpitations, hyperventilation and nausea. However, for up to two months following a trip, I experience few to no panic attacks. I notice a significant increase in positivity and productivity. I was never inclined to maintain a clean room until the months following my first trip, when I began straightening my room every day and making my bed because the clutter became uncomfortable. It was a small but tangible difference in my daily routine.

I cannot say for certain that my mental health improved because of psychedelic use, but placebo effect or not, the positive changes after a trip are noticeable and bountiful.

And I am not alone in reaping the benefits of psychedelics. Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann accidentally discovered LSD in 1938 while experimenting with lysergic acid. The iteration of lysergic acid, LSD-25, was initially dismissed.

But Hofmann was intrigued by the chemical and five years later, he resynthesized LSD-25, becoming the first person to experience an acid trip when the chemical was absorbed through his fingertips.

As he came down, Hofmann described that “everything glistened and sparkled in a fresh light. The world was as if newly created.”

Already a founding father in psychedelic research, Hofmann also isolated psilocybin, the psychoactive chemical in around 100 species of mushrooms, in 1957. Though psilocybin was brought into Western scientific purview in the 1950s, the chemical has been used for thousands of years for religious and medicinal purposes in indigenous cultures around the world.

Initial studies on the effects of psilocybin and LSD showed the chemicals to be useful in treating addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. Several studies on the positive effects of psilocybin mushrooms on mental health in the early 2000s marked the beginning of the second-wave of psychedelic research. Participants given psilocybin experienced an increase in altruism, mood about self and feelings of spirituality for up to six months following the experiment.

Psychedelic advocates are hopeful for the future of natural pharmacology. Activists in cities across the U.S. are working to decriminalize psilocybin mushrooms in an effort to begin the long road to legalization.

Like any mind-altering substance, moderation is key. Just as you wouldn't drink 10 cups of coffee in one sitting and expect to be functional, you wouldn't take several handfuls of psilocybin mushrooms every day and expect a normal existence.

A good trip can be more therapeutic than therapy, more insightful than meditation and more peaceful than sleep.

But if you did take a handful of magic mushrooms, there isn't much to worry about. Psychedelics are situational drugs, meaning a “bad trip” is usually caused by an uncomfortable environment or who you are with.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no scientific evidence correlating psychedelic use to increased likelihood of mental illness. Quite the opposite, in fact.

A 2013 study conducted with 22,000 participants found ample evidence that psychedelic use was correlated with a lower rate of mental illness.

Although I haven't been subjected to rigorous scientific

testing on the effects of psychedelics, I can attest to their personal impact. I am familiar with the way I treat myself during a trip and in the months following: kind and gentle. I can feel the atmosphere of the room, brimming with boundless love for each other. A good trip can be more therapeutic than therapy, more insightful than meditation and more peaceful than sleep.

I awake to the parts of myself I dismiss: self-love, confidence, patience, perseverance, wonder.

One by one they resurface, passionate and stronger each time.

* Editor's note: The author has chosen to remain anonymous because psilocybin is criminalized in Washington state at the time of publication.





→ Emissions plume above a tree line during sunrise.

Watch Your Step

STORY Samantha Baxley | PHOTO Adam Vincent

How understanding our own carbon footprint can allow us to make the radical changes necessary to protect our environment.

WHILE THE SUN ROSE, I watched from the window as its golden rays peeked out from behind the horizon, bouncing off the delicate snowflakes cascading softly from the dark sky.

My phone dings: School has been canceled for the third day this week. A thick layer of snow rests heavily on the branches of the trees outside, where it's a frigid 19 degrees. But I didn't have to brave the snow. I spent the day lounging around in shorts and a cotton T-shirt, content to watch the snow fall from inside my warm house with electric heaters humming in every room.

I relaxed, insulated from the frosty air outside, not giving a second thought to the carbon emissions emanating from my toasty house as I cranked up the knob on the thermostat.

Those hard-working wall heaters require power and,

in combination with the other electrical appliances in my house, I used about 12,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity last year.

On average, your household probably uses the same amount of electricity as mine, or approximately 8.5 metric tons—more than 1,300 pounds—of carbon each year.

To put that into perspective, it would take 141 tree seedlings, growing for 10 years, to trap the carbon emissions created by my home's electrical use alone. With over 138 million households estimated in the United States—that's over 19.5 billion new seedlings each year.

While climate change has become hyper-relevant to today's society, it's a wildly complicated conversation. So, if you're wondering why you should care about carbon emissions and what an abundance of carbon in our ecosystem means, don't worry, you're not alone.

Charles Barnhart, an assistant professor at Western Washington University's Huxley College explains that climate change, on a base level, is spurred by carbon and greenhouse gases which trap infrared radiation in the atmosphere, resulting in more energy in the system.

The effects of that extra energy may feel like a distant dilemma to many, but the reality is, we can already feel the effects of climate change. Since 1981, we have seen an average increase in global temperature of 0.32 degrees Fahrenheit per decade. This increase is more than two times greater than before 1981. Following 2001, we have also seen 19 of the 20 warmest years on record.

While 0.32 degrees may seem insubstantial to us, Barnhart says it's incredibly fast from a geological perspective and the rate that it is increasing is what's important to note. Global temperature is steadily rising, however, that doesn't mean you won't ever experience a frigid, snowy winter day again. We will still experience cold weather but the baseline for temperature will be raised, according to Nick Bond, a research scientist at the University of Washington and climatologist for the State of Washington.

The Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets have also been changing rapidly, losing more than 300 gigatons of ice per year combined as the Earth warms.

Now if you, like me, don't know what a gigaton is off the top of your head don't worry. The Washington Post estimates just one gigaton is equivalent to 400,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

This melting ice contributes to increasing sea levels, and these ice sheets play an essential role in regulating our global temperature.

Ice is like a mirror reflecting the sun's rays back into space, so less ice means fewer rays are being reflected. This creates a feedback loop, according to Barnhart, meaning as we lose ice the ocean absorbs more heat, increasing global temperature—causing the loss of even more ice.

The greatest contributors to increasing global temperature are greenhouse gases. Almost everything we do and use today is producing or has produced greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2016, Western Washington University used more than 132 million kilowatt-hours of electricity, producing almost 94,000 metric tons of carbon. To put that number into perspective, it takes a cumulative 16,000 homes annually to use the same amount of electricity.

On an even larger scale, Amazon reported CO₂ emissions totaling 44.4 million metric tons. This is equivalent to the yearly electrical use of 7.5 million homes.

With such a startling difference between corporate emissions and an individual's, it can be difficult to fathom what one person can do to help.

When I think about my carbon footprint in comparison to Western's or Amazon's, mine feels microscopic. It's chal-

lenging to understand how my individual contribution to a global problem is anything more than a drop in the bucket. In the U.S., our personal carbon footprint averages out to around 20 metric tons per person, in comparison, the world average is four. These numbers will vary depending on the source as it is not a perfect science.

Using the Carbon Footprint calculator, I found my carbon emissions to be approximately 20.29 metric tons. This isn't an exact number but it does provide a rough estimate as well as an in-depth look at different areas of my life.

For me, it was most interesting to see that just one of the flights I took last year from Seattle to Alaska added an additional 2.73 metric tons of carbon to my footprint and that the 11,000 miles I drove represented over six metric tons of carbon added to the atmosphere.

"I just feel like a jerk if I bring a steak over to a barbecue and everybody's having roasted cauliflower. Social status is a huge motivator for behavioral change."

Those are the big-ticket items, but the small contributors matter too. One pound of beef represents over six pounds of carbon emissions.

"Our choices, what we consume, what we eat, how we spend our dollars, in terms of influencing change, all of those things matter and they add up. We do individually add up to the scale of the problem," said Jill MacIntyre Witt, an instructor at Western Washington University and author of the "Climate Justice Field Manual."

There are over 329 million people in the U.S., and if we each changed one light bulb we would reduce U.S. carbon emissions by over 8.5 million metric tons annually.

By changing our individual actions, we make considerable improvements to our personal footprint and can inspire others to modify their behaviors resulting in a broader impact.

"I just feel like a jerk if I bring a steak over to a barbecue and everybody's having roasted cauliflower," Barnhart said. "Social status is a huge motivator for behavioral change."

Using the Carbon Footprint Calculator allowed me to see which of my behaviors were the greatest polluters and make changes so that my actions are more in line with my values. Reducing the miles I drive by taking the bus more, changing my light bulbs and turning the thermostat down are all ways I am reducing my carbon footprint.

Now, as the wind roars outside my window, rattling tree branches once layered with snow, I reach for a blanket instead of the thermostat.



→ Porter and Jon Holt check a map during a blizzard on Siwash Pass, British Columbia.

Photo courtesy of Kyle McCrohan

A Fevered Pitch

STORY Audra Anderson

A young athlete rejects ordinary life to pursue his sport.

THE SKY IS DARKENING by the time Porter McMichael ducks into his 1998 Ford van — which he’s playfully dubbed “Vantasy”— escaping the mid-January downpour. The van looks out of place amid the array of bargain cars owned by cheap college students. It’s reminiscent of the vehicle your mom warned you to avoid accepting candy from, but inside, it’s a nomad’s haven. The van has been converted into a livable space, with a bed in the back, storage space beneath it and a makeshift kitchen behind the front seats. Porter flips on a space heater, settles into a modified Ikea bench that he’s built into the wall and slides on a pair of worn black Crocs.

In the dim light, his skin is reddened and ruddy — except for a portion of his face that has escaped the sun’s brutal beating in the telltale shape of ski goggles. Hazel eyes pierce through the red, their golden flecks the same color as his bouncy curls and full beard.

Behind him, taped to the inside wall of his van, is a collection of 4x6 photos. In one, the 22-year-old Western Washington University student hunkers against brutal winds on the summit of South Twin Sister Mountain, southeast of Mount Baker. Snow-capped peaks loom behind him, their grandeur taunting the worn athlete.

The trek is only one of 50 alpine routes he has conquered.

“I’m motivated, maybe to a fault,” he said with a laugh. Smile lines crack and texturize his otherwise smooth skin, resembling a weathered rock face. “I’m bold in my climbing style. And, I don’t want to say foolish, but maybe I should.”

Unlike many of his fellow college students, Porter isn’t partying on the weekends, he’s at work. His office is Mount

Rainier and the North Cascades, and his clients are ordinary people hungry for an extraordinary experience. Porter works for International Mountain Guides, where he leads ice climbs and summits nearly every weekend, every season since the summer of 2018.

Porter became interested in mountaineering when he met fellow athlete Peter Butler on the university's cross country team. Peter, a seasoned climber, introduced Porter to the world of mountain climbing in the winter of their first year. He was instantly enchanted.

Having grown up in the Tri-Cities of Southeast Washington, Porter was unfamiliar with the belittling peaks and daunting slopes of Western Washington. Even so, he found solace in the blankets of untouched snow begging to be skied. He found music in the rhythmic crunch of an ice pick. Most significantly, he settled into the addicting exhilaration of the sport.

Each ascent flirted with death; for the athlete, it was a game of catch-me-if-you-can.

By the summer after his first year of mountaineering experience, Porter landed a guiding job. Natural talent on the mountain and his people skills gave him an irresistible charm, according to Peter's sister and fellow mountain guide, Lael Butler.

Lael knows Porter to be a patient, motivating and mellow

guide, but as soon as he gears up for a personal climb, Porter morphs into someone far more formidable. He is driven, focused, obsessive. Bad weather or risky routes are a challenge to him rather than a deterrent. When the mountains are telling him "No," he bellows, "Yes!"

"[Porter] knows what he's really stoked on and knows what he wants to do, so he just does it for himself," Lael said. "It's cool to see someone who already knows what they want to get out of life."

Porter's absolute submission to the sport is something Lael admires most about him.

"I don't know why, but I sure as heck can't stop," Porter said, defiance tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Running, climbing, work and school duties don't leave the athlete with much time for himself or other people. His lasting friends are the ones who can keep up with him on the mountain. He finds pockets of company wherever he parks his van. Many of his days are spent solo, puttering up rocky mountain roads or listening to the wind batter his van as he plans his next climb. His lifestyle doesn't lend itself to company. At least not in the traditional sense.

Abbey Thomas, Porter's ex-girlfriend, met the bubbly climber at Western's Wade King Student Recreation Center. Abbey, a climber herself, was drawn to his goofy jokes and wayward smile, but also the intensity boiling beneath.

→ Porter lies down on a bed inside his 1998 Ford van, dubbed the "Vantasy," where he resides.

Photo by Christa Yaranon



Abbey knew he was a dedicated mountaineer, and she was prepared for that, having grown up around esteemed climbers like Conrad Anker and Craig Zaspel. What Abbey wasn't prepared for was the loneliness. Porter didn't take her on his more intense climbs because he couldn't bear the thought of putting a loved one at risk. When he was home, he spent his free time exercising or fiddling with his gear.

"I've sunk several relationships, not just by my obsessiveness about climbing, but also the risks I take were a lot for one or two significant others to take," Porter said, gazing at the floor as if it could provide him answers. A deep sadness strains the smile that never leaves his face.

The sound of rain drums the top of his van as Porter wipes his hands on his shorts. An angry scar spans his left thumb, a battle wound from a climb that almost went fatally wrong.

Porter and his climbing partner, Peter, planned to scale Coleman Glacier Headwall, a route notorious for rockfall. Shortly after starting to climb, a couple microwave-sized boulders careened down the route, narrowly missing them. Still, the pair decided to ski down the pre-planned slope. Their route out: A slender snowbridge spanning a bergschrund, a deep crevasse formed when glacier ice pulls away from stagnant ice.

"Our skis were barely holding over this bergschrund that wants to eat you," Porter said.

As Porter prepared to cross the snowbridge, he noticed a crack in the bergschrund, causing him to lean back in his skis to prevent his tips from catching on the ice. He lost balance and tumbled down the slope, straight for the open crevasse. Right before he slid in, he whipped his skis around, stopping his fall. When he caught his breath, he looked down to see a portion of his thumb sliced off, painting the surrounding snow crimson.

"The hardest, most technical routes, I don't usually come away from them feeling proud," Porter said. "I sometimes come away from them feeling like I got lucky, or I got away with something I shouldn't have."

In the eight months they were together, Abbey never saw the athlete frightened by a route.

"Guilt inhibits him more than fear," Abbey said. "Fear is something he feeds off of."

Even after close calls like Coleman Glacier Headwall, Porter returns to the mountains days later with renewed resolve. His sport is wrought with situations that force him to face mortality. For Porter, it fuels his addiction.

Reaching the top isn't as rewarding as the journey there. In a sport as volatile as mountaineering, an inability to summit is common. Befriending failure is as important as perseverance.

For Porter, his tenacity was a learned behavior. From the age of four, Porter was knee-deep in snow, skiing with his



↳ Porter short ropes with clients up Mount Rainier's Disappointment Cleaver route.

Photo courtesy of Simon Fraser

family at resorts. Snow turned to dirt as Porter shifted his focus to cross country running. By the age of nine, Porter had picked up knife-making, turning a hobby into a profitable business by the end of high school. Porter adopted the "if you want something done, do it yourself," mantra. Unlike his brother, a successful economist for the State of Montana, Porter knew his life wouldn't be molded by other people's expectations.


"Somehow my brother has a master's degree and a real job, and I live in 'a van down by the river,'" Porter said with a chuckle, tugging on his beard.

With his spring graduation around the corner, Porter plans to spend the summer guiding Denali Mountain in southern Alaska. He has no "Plan B" for his life because he is determined to climb for the rest of it. Eventually, he plans to take an ice axe to Aconcagua Mountain in Argentina and Mt. Everest in Nepal.

"I would never climb Everest for fun, but probably in the next five years I'll guide it," Porter said.

Even considering the threat of injury, the athlete would sooner join the disabled climbing community than quit. Porter has no desire for a family because he doesn't want a child to grow up fatherless if something were to happen to him on the mountain. He does dream of marrying one day, under one condition: Whoever he loves will also marry his climbing.

As heavy rainfall slows its assault on the Vantasy's roof, Porter crouches — unable to fully stand — and adjusts his royal blue jacket. Behind him, an empty McDonald's fry box sits alone in the driver's seat cup holder. The passenger's seat is occupied by climbing gear and a pair of skis and poles; there's no room left for anything or anyone else.



ELIAS

Dear J*hn,

You'll be 14 when you first think of changing your name. You'll start with Michael, or maybe, J*hn Michael - just to be different. You'll think to yourself, "J*hn is such a basic name."

You're right.

At 18 you'll come across a character with the name Elian from some forgettable book probably long since donated. You first think it's pronounced "eh-lian." You like lions, I know you do because I still do. Unfortunately, this doesn't shake out. You're confusing it with your sisters' best friend from high school. She pronounces it properly: "el-e-on."

It'll only take you a few months to figure out that what you really meant was Elias.

Elias. Say it again. That's right - it feels right. The name fits better than J*hn ever did because it's yours

You try it out, cautiously asking professors after class if they wouldn't mind calling you Elias instead of J*hn. It sticks - no one objects. You're really only comfortable telling your closest peers and professors, but even with them happily making the switch, it still feels like you're faking it. At work, you still go by J*hn. At home, you wouldn't dream of renouncing the name John - your parents ~~would~~ never forgive you. For your own sake, you won't introduce them to Elias until you're ready for the emotional fallout.

Lately, you've been threading the needle by signing your emails with, "J*hn 'Elias' Olson." It's a good half-measure.

Because now, at 20, it feels like the perfect time. Your 20s are for reinventing yourself, finding your place in the world. Nothing would feel better than to give Jithn - the name given to you by people who wouldn't dare to have a queer son - a giant middle finger. You want to scream to the world that you are Elias St. Clair, not Jithn Olson. And you are. You always have been.

In 2020, changing your name - or not taking a partner's name - is becoming more common. Apart from marriage, other reasons to change one's name include adopting stage names, distancing yourself from your parents (like you've just done), or adopting a name that better fits one's gender identity.

In the United Kingdom, a record 85,000 people changed their name via a deed poll - or written notice of intent used in name changes - according to an article from Vice.

But in the U.S., changing your name is a more complicated process. It's not hard per se, but as a broke college student with very little time on your hands, \$500 is a lot of ramen to spend on document replacements and fees.

Six years ago you wouldn't have dreamed of changing your name. Two years ago you struggled with feeling stupid over almost picking a mispronunciation as your name. Now, it's a matter of getting to the end of college. Then you can fully change your name and put this all behind you. But it doesn't free you fully - only time can do that.

You'll find yourself accidentally using Jithn, you'll bristle when you run into old peers who've only known you as Jithn, and you're still not sure if your parents will ever come around to calling you Elias. That's okay though because Elias is yours. You choose it. You've molded an identity around it. Now you get to live it, and that's the best part.

Just keep your head up and remember to breathe,

elias.



→ The Yaranon family pictured on a camping trip at Olympic National Park.

Photo courtesy of Shaina Yaranon

Ingat ka

STORY Shaina Yaranon

A journey of embracing one's identity as a child of immigrants.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PINPOINT the first moment I grappled with being Filipino American. For as long as I can remember, I just felt like I didn't belong. At school, I was often the only Filipino in my classroom. And at home, I couldn't understand the conversations that my parents had with each other in their own language.

My parents immigrated to America from the Philippines in the 1990s because their greatest hope was for their children to have better lives—and the U.S. was their solution. After my dad made it to Seattle, my mother and older sister didn't join him for six years.

I was born in America, but I always struggled with the concept of home. I loved Seattle, but home was also a far-off place. It was across the Pacific Ocean, a group of islands with rolling mountains, turquoise waters and sandy beaches stretching as far as the eye could see. A land filled to the

brim with people who looked like me.

As I grew older, I always longed to find my roots. I spent long nights flipping through the dusty, worn-out pages of family photo albums while my parents shared stories of their past lives, their eyes filled with a childlike wonder.

But looking through photo albums could only do so much. All I ever wanted was to feel at home and to experience my heritage and culture for myself. When we returned to the Philippines as a family in 2008, my wish came true. My parents' homeland was vibrant and full of life, from the bustling outdoor marketplaces and the bright jeepney cars to the rice fields blanketed in brilliant shades of green. The humidity sunk into my skin, and I felt safe in the Philippines' warm embrace.

When the near-constant rain subsided and the sun filtered through the palm trees, I thought back to the photo



↳ Shaina stands on the shore of Locust Beach in Bellingham, Wash. on Feb. 21, 2020.

Photo by Christa Yaranon

albums back in America. I was home now, it was real.

On our last day, my relatives threw a goodbye party. The horizon was painted with vivid hues of red and gold as the sunset faded into the crashing waves. The sounds of laughter and singing echoed from the pavilion. My sister and I ran around the beach, our feet softly padding against the sand beneath a canvas of a dark sky flecked with stars.

It was across the Pacific Ocean, a place with rolling mountains, turquoise waters and sandy beaches stretching as far as the eye could see. A land filled to the brim with the kindest people you'd ever meet.

At the end of our visit, everyone hugged each other goodbye. “Ingat ka,” they told each other, a saying that translates to “you take care” in Tagalog. It’s a saying with a lot of love built in—an affirmation that Filipinos look out for one another.

I didn’t want to leave. It was where I belonged. I couldn’t even imagine how my parents had felt leaving this beautiful country and their family and friends behind. How could I return to the states after experiencing all the warmth of the Philippines?

Back in Seattle, I felt more out of place than ever.

“Where are you from?” a man asked, his voice raspy. He was an older fellow. His green eyes seemed kind and filled with curiosity. It was eight years after our return and a stranger was peering down at my sister and I as we stood in line at a bookstore. “Oh, we’re from here,” I told him cheerily.

His eyes narrowed for a flash of a second. “No. Where are you really from?”

I suddenly felt glued to the floor and offered a weak smile back at him, unable to hide all the hurt I felt. His words stung. My sister’s eyes flickered to mine and she spoke up, “We’re Filipino.” We made tense small talk with him, said our goodbyes and hurriedly walked out of the store clutching our books, shaken to the core.

As I’ve grown older, I’ve stumbled across many frustrating situations like this. Situations where I couldn’t articulate the emotion and anxiety of feeling like an outsider.

People see tan skin and black hair and automatically think *foreigner*. My family all believed America was a welcoming place with boundless opportunities and open arms, yet again and again, we are greeted with discrimination and ignorance.

These moments, though disheartening, made me realize one thing: even in the midst of endless uncertainty, I knew I couldn’t let people define my identity, and that I needed to prove to myself that I was meant to be here.

Part of that journey was enrolling in college. In the winter

of 2017, my sister and I transferred to Western Washington University. It was our first time moving away from home, and my dad drove with us to help us settle in.

As we wound through the Chuckanut Mountains, I sat in the front seat with my hands wrapped around my knees, staring absentmindedly at the steady pulse of traffic buzzing by. Beside me, my dad was concentrating on the road ahead, but I could tell something was wrong. There was a twinge of sadness under his smile, and his hands were trembling on the steering wheel.

After helping us carry our belongings into our new home, my dad got into his car and waved goodbye. As I waved back, my heart skipped a beat. I repeated in my head that they would only be an hour and a half away and watched as his tail lights faded into tiny specks in the distance.

My family all believed America was a welcoming place with boundless opportunities and open arms, yet again and again, we are greeted with discrimination and ignorance.

I didn't even unpack the first box before my mom called. She rambled on for what felt like an eternity. I assured her, as much as myself, that I was excited for what was ahead and that I wanted to be here.

Then the line went quiet. After a slight pause, she broke the silence.

"Ingat ka, anak. I love you," she said softly. *You take care, my child. I love you.*

Her words opened the floodgates I had desperately tried to hold back. *Ingat ka.* The words rang in my head. Even though I hear the phrase daily, for some strange reason at that moment, it stunned me into silence.

I looked through the cracks of my window blinds; already late in the day, the winter sun had cast its last rays on the tips of the evergreen trees. I thought anxiously about the days to come—my first classes, graduation, a career.

And then it dawned on me: My parents got me here. They paved the way for my sisters and me.

With the phone still clutched against my ear, I pictured my parents sitting together at home, seeing for the first time the decades of struggle present in their weathered brown eyes—physical evidence of many tumultuous, stormy waves, the catalyst for my own strength.

My muddled thoughts started to clear. I finally began to embrace who I am: unabashedly Filipino American, unendingly proud of the many places and people I call home. I knew what I wanted to say and what I must do.

"Ingat ka. I love you too, Mom."



↳ Elaine and Cesar Yaranon carry their twin daughters, Christa and Shaina while peach picking in the summer of 1998.

Photo courtesy of Shaina Yaranon

→ Alluvial Farms co-owners Matthew McDermott and Katie Pencke stand with their son, Ramone Pencke, on their land on Feb. 7, 2020.





Welcoming the Dawn

STORY MacKenzie Dexter | PHOTOS Christa Yaranon

In light of the climate crisis, Whatcom County farms embrace sustainability.

MISTY WINTER MORNINGS in the Pacific Northwest settle over the landscape like a thick wool coat, leaving the muddy hills of Whatcom County farmlands slick with dew.

On one particularly cool day in January, roosters at Silver Creek Farm crow from a new perch, watching over their stomping grounds as hens scramble for seeds freshly scattered in rows of sprouting garlic. Ten minutes east at Alluvial Farms, a pregnant pig eats her breakfast, unaware that she'll welcome 11 new piglets later in the day. At Ten Fold Farm, herds of sheep frolic through an open field, greeting each other with familiarity.

While these farms couldn't look more different on the same day, they are linked by one passion: sustainability.

With the rise of climate consciousness, people are looking to adopt more sustainable ways of living. And when 73% of global consumers want to change their eating habits to cater to the environment, farmers become the foundation of that change.

Many farms around the nation have been practicing sustainability for decades. But as consumers wake up to the negative impacts of mass production of goods, small farms are popping up like flowers, ready to serve a burgeoning group of young sustainable eaters.

Among the many components contributing to climate change, agriculture, including deforestation and other land use, accounts for a third of greenhouse gas emissions. As politicians fail to respond to the industry's contributions to climate change, small scale operations are filling the gap. But while change is possible, the process of going sustainable is complex and operates on economic, social and environmental levels.



➡ Meg Delzell, co-owner of Silver Creek farm exits a newly installed greenhouse, where they use cover crop tactics and harvest most of their produce for the summer.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, environmental sustainability means maintaining soil quality, using water cautiously, reducing pollution and encouraging biodiversity.

Economic sustainability involves finding ways to support economic growth in a way that won't harm the environment or stability of a population.

Social sustainability is about actively influencing the greater well-being of a given culture or community.

Even with years of farming and a foundation of sustainable practices, practicing eco-friendly tactics takes time, education and effort.

For Tiffany Bell, co-owner of Ten Fold Farm, all of these factors were integral to her approach.

Since 2015, Ten Fold Farm has sought to provide healthy food and farming education to people in Whatcom County and beyond.

The farm grows a variety of Certified Naturally Grown vegetables that are sold at local farmers markets. They also raise and sell USDA beef, pork and chicken.

When the 10-acre farm was purchased, there was minimal organic matter in the soil, meaning a lack of diverse microorganisms that allow the release of nutrients. Bell explains

the process of healthy soil as a cycle—one that can be initiated at any point. For her, it is important to work with the land instead of against it.

The cycle begins with bugs and earthworms that break down organic matter and release their nutrients back into the soil. This process makes it easy for plants to absorb those vitamins and nutrients which they, in turn, pass to people. Farm animals are also a vital part of the cycle because they eat the plants too and their waste returns to the ground, fertilizing the soil without the use of artificial fertilizers or harmful chemicals.

Even with years of farming and a foundation of sustainable practices, practicing eco-friendly tactics take time, education and effort.

"Sustainability isn't something immediate, something that is all or nothing," Bell said. "Sustainability is something that starts small and grows."

For Alluvial Farms, being sustainable means using land well. As co-owner Katie Pencke trudges through the mud outside of the barn, her boots stick and squelch. She pauses to point to where the land naturally slopes, explaining that the farm uses this to its advantage. The run-off caused by rain runs down the slope away from the nearby creek, fertilizing the grain pasture the pigs feed on.

In the future, Pencke and Alluvial Farms co-owner Matthew McDermott hope to plant a forest of trees to fence off the stream from any potential runoff. Since opening the farm two years ago, the pair has consistently done research to discover new ways to incorporate sustainable practices, even during off-seasons.

"[We're] constantly studying best management practices,

research in our region in [the] field of organic and sustainable agriculture and applying for funding to continue our own research,” Pencke said.

While some sustainable farms require more space, some areas are as small as five acres and are surrounded by neighbors.

Silver Creek Farm is nestled far outside of town and is kept guard by Kai the smiling corgi. Haley Davis and her mother, Meg Delzell, own the farm and live on the property together. They sell a variety of produce to local restaurants and farmers markets.

With a background in biology, Davis has a passion for experimentation in farming and often discovers new ways to practice sustainability.

Another challenge, Davis said, is marketing her different produce.

“I grew some tomatoes [and] I don’t have anyone to sell [them] to,” Davis said. “That’s been the hardest for me – is that hustle as a business person, to try to find someone who wants to buy them.”

While capital can make sustainable farming a hard business to run, that doesn’t make it impossible.

“Farming isn’t something that people go into to get rich, the majority of us do it because we love growing food for people,” Bell said.

Bell said when the larger community learns how to grow their own crops, such as a tomato plant or herbs, they better understand the enjoyment farmers gain from their work.

“I think a lot of people would appreciate having that experience because then they can see that tomato in the store and realize, like, this tomato took this many hours to grow,” Bell said. “And so then they get a better appreciation for that.”

Whether it’s a farmer, consumer or new gardener, farming has a simple goal: sustainability and community.

According to the Farmers Market Coalition, local retailers like farmers markets give back more than three times their sales to the local economy. In 2018, \$24 million was spent at farmers markets in the U.S., giving access to low-income community members and revenue for farmers.

Pencke says that supporting local sustainable farms will help people feel more connected to the environment and where their food comes from, as well as support the generations to come.

“Farming sustainably is a lot of work, but the rewards are healthier living and an ever-expanding base of experiences,” Bell said. “Being scared is a perfectly normal emotion, but with knowledge, experience and exposure those fears reduce. Who isn’t initially afraid of something new and unknown?”



➡ Piglets pile on top of each other at Alluvial Farms.



➡ Haley Davis, co-owner of Silver Creek Farm, pulls a radish from the soil on Feb. 6, 2020.



Better With You

STORY Samantha Baxley | PHOTO Christa Yaranon

Dear Oliver,

Your cold, wet nose presses to the side of my face. Paw across my chest. Eyes open slightly, waiting. It's 7 a.m. We're still cozy in bed, but warm yellow light is pouring in through the windows, and you know it's almost time to wake up.

I reach over to scratch your velvety ears and you spring into action, frantically leaping to the end of the bed, grabbing your stuffy, tail thrashing through the air. You pounce on me, dropping your purple dinosaur on my chest, hoping I will throw it.

It's our morning routine that I've come to depend on. The way your eyes light up and your tail wags in anticipation of the day brings a wide smile to my face. It's a stark departure from the grim, dull look I used to wear.

Since the day you came home with me, the dark waves that once used to consume me have been kept at bay. Something no little pill was ever able to do.

Before you, I dragged myself out of bed to class, to work and home again. Spending more time asleep than awake, not caring to join my friends for a drink, head to the gym for a workout, or make dinner, because everything took an abundance of energy that I didn't have.

I am not alone in this battle. More than 264 million people around the world suffer from anxiety and depression, but knowing I wasn't alone didn't change the feelings of hopelessness that relentlessly prodded at my life.

Every night I would collapse into bed and pick up the hard orange plastic bottle that sat on my bedside table taunting me, squeeze and twist the white lid off and swallow what were supposed to be my happy pills. Hoping that tomorrow would be the day they worked, the day I had energy, the day I felt capable of interacting with the people around me.

That day didn't come until I met you. It was a bright and clear spring morning, blue skies in my mind and outside. I had isolated myself all winter and, for the first time in months, I desperately wanted a reason to get out of the

house. I found myself at the humane society, walking down an aisle of caged dogs. I wasn't expecting to find my best friend that day, but halfway down the row of stark kennels, my eyes met yours.

Your shining, spirited eyes held as much hope for me as mine did for you.

You were 50 pounds, with droopy dull orange fur covering skin that looked three sizes too big, but you had a wide grin and lively golden brown eyes that I couldn't pass up.

Before I knew it, I was being dragged through the parking lot, your tongue hanging out of your mouth, slobber flying, while you chomped on a yellow tennis ball that you refused to leave behind.

Since you rescued me I have found the person I had forgotten and those orange bottles I detested now sit dusty and untouched. I, like most people, still despise the sound of my morning alarm, but you push the darkness away with your vivacity and enthusiasm for life.

Every day is filled with little moments of joy. When I get home from school you're at the door, snorting, tail wagging eagerly, eyes wide with excitement, begging me to go outside. Your constant desire to explore and play has led to earlier mornings, afternoons spent swimming in the cold clear water of a nearby river, and nights at the park throwing your slimy yellow tennis ball. My brightest days are the ones spent with you, the sun shining down on us, cool air making my skin prickle.

At the end of the day after we make our way home, your sleepy tender eyes looking back at me are a reminder of how lucky I am to have you in my life. You make it possible for me to not only survive, but thrive.

As I sit here writing this letter to you, you're snoring soundly beside me, breathing deeply, one paw across my chest, eyes closed tightly. I only hope that you know how much you mean to me, how much love, light and happiness you've brought to my life.

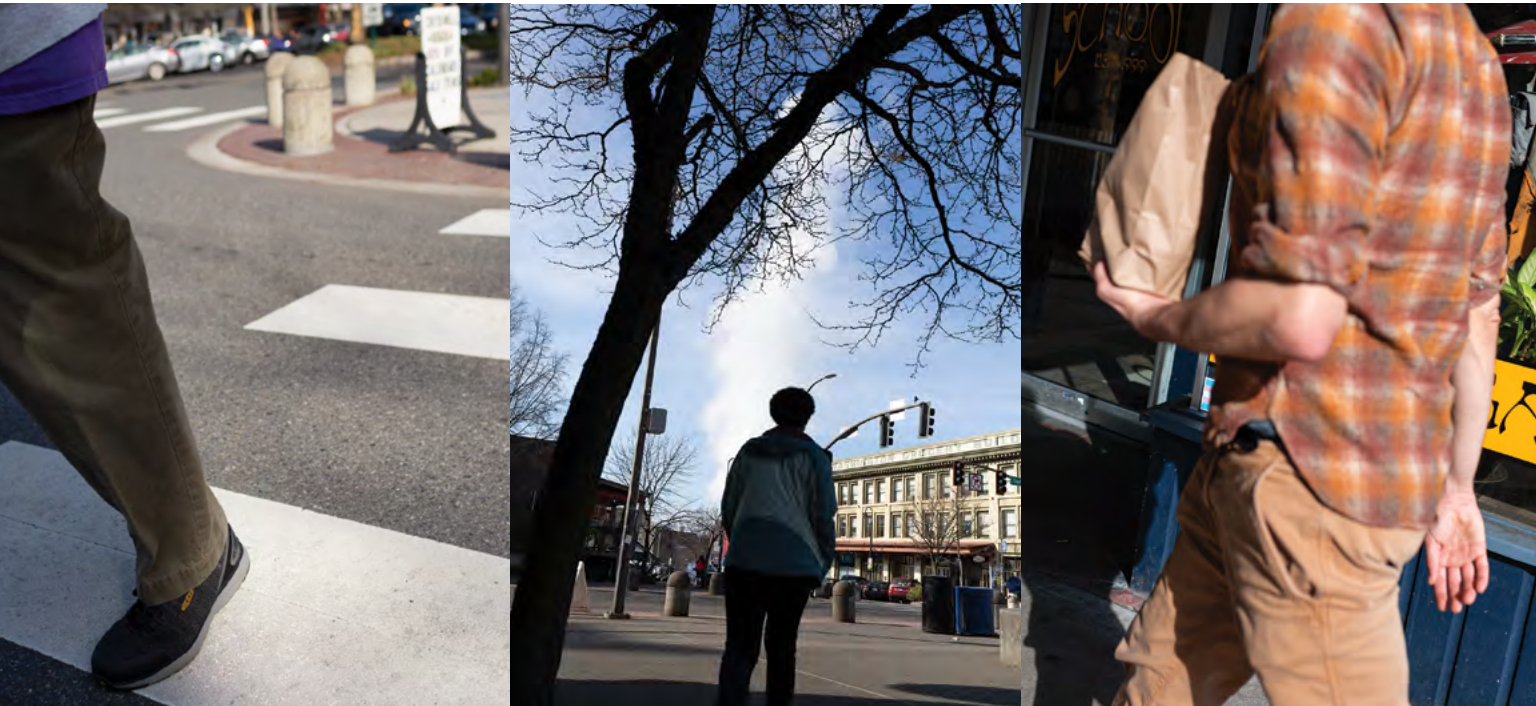
I hope I've done the same for you.

Love,
Samy

Can You See Me?

STORY Maya Anderson | PHOTOS Adam Vincent

A call to my community from
the shadow of isolation.



↳ Scenes from downtown Bellingham, Wash. taken on Feb 21, 2020 depicting an incident which occurred on Jan 28.

I'M SO FOCUSED that I don't notice him at first.

I'm conducting my second interview of the day, at a coffee shop in the heart of Bellingham. My source is excited to tell her story, and my fingers tap along the keyboard to document her thoughts. I want to get every detail right.

When he stops at our table his brows are furrowed in what seems to be concern and confusion. He's dressed in a dark jacket with white stripes, dark jeans and a brown knit cap. His sneakers are worn and his nose is slightly red from the cold.

"I'm just wondering why you did it," the stranger says, peering down at me. "My mom and everyone in my whole family hates the shit out of you."

I'm stunned into silence, yet my source remains calm.

"I think you're mistaken for somebody else," she says.

She's done this before, but I don't know how to respond. After some convincing, he leaves.

When our interview ends, I close my laptop with a sigh of relief. I thank the woman for her time and pack up my things, waving as she walks out the door.

When I leave minutes later, he's standing outside the building. Our eyes meet briefly, and I quickly turn to face the cars rolling by. Weighing my options, I decide it may be best to cross the street instead of getting too close.

I don't give him any attention, but I can tell he wants it.

As I cross the street, he yells out the dreaded N-word.

He calls me a rapist.

It's OK, I reassure myself. This isn't the first time. So long as he stays on the corner, you're safe.

Another street corner and I've put a good distance between us. I allow myself to breathe.

But it isn't over. I hear footsteps approaching from behind. It's him.

He says I should hang myself, says I don't deserve to live.

My voice is surprisingly firm as I tell him to leave me alone. When he persists, I remember what I've seen people do on the news. I pull out my phone and start recording a video.

He spots the phone clenched in my hands and his bitter expression twists into hatred. I'm concerned he might take it, so I press it against my chest. He's so close to me that we nearly touch shoulders. Still, I make sure to capture his face in the frame.

He flips me off.

"Kill her ass!" he yells to the people on the corner as I stop at another crosswalk, praying for the light to change.

One woman walks past, watching the scene unfold. She stops behind me, conflicted. A few moments later, she's at my side. She asks if I want company. I hesitantly agree, telling her I'm headed to the bus station. It's just a block away, and there's usually police there. Surely they can do something.

The light turns red, and it's safe to cross. I feel a surge of

confidence as she walks with me, step-by-step.

But as soon as I reach the other end, she's gone. Almost as if I'd dreamt she was there.

I'm alone again.

I can still hear him cursing behind me.

He says I don't deserve anything I have, that I should die. Even Black people don't like me, he screams. No matter how fast I walk, he's mere steps behind.

The people who pass by keep their heads down, avoiding any eye contact. It's almost like I don't exist. I watch them, wondering if anyone will intervene.

They don't.

Maybe I'm the dream. Everything is numb – like I'm wading through emptiness. Nothing makes sense. Why me? Why now?

He follows me past a row of restaurants. A burger joint, a café, the crêpe shop. The customers inside watch me behind the safety of thick windows. They observe with intrigue, like they're on the set of a reality TV show and I'm the entertainment.

One man watches wide-eyed as he takes a large bite from his burger. The toppings spill out onto his plate. He's more interested in sweeping up the mess with his bun. Others look on with annoyance, eyes narrowing. *How dare I interrupt their family meal?*

"You are the DEVIL!" he yells so loud I can hear the strain in his voice.

And I almost believe the words he screams at me.

When he stops, I don't know why; I just keep walking. The bus is in sight, its engine rumbling to life as it prepares to leave. I run to make it on time.

I step on the bus and look behind me. He hasn't followed.

The affirming beep after I've swiped my student ID card is an assurance of refuge. As I sit down, my mind is only on getting home.

I can only thank God he didn't lay a hand on me. Then I begin to wonder what I would've done if he had. Would I get to my pepper spray fast enough? Would those two self-defense sessions have kicked in, or would I have been too panicked?

Then I remember the streets weren't empty. This man had managed to do the impossible. He'd turned me into a ghost. My pain was invisible, easily disregarded by dozens of witnesses as if I were no more than litter on the curb.

But the most troubling thought of all rang in my head for weeks: Will the safety of a young Black woman ever outweigh the taste of juicy cow meat?

* Editor's note: This incident occurred on Jan. 28, 2020 while the author was on assignment for Klipsun. It was reported to the Bellingham Police Department.



Odd Man Out

STORY Jack Taylor | ILLUSTRATION Tristan Bedell

What I wish I knew about LGBTQ+ dating when I was 18.

TO PUT IT SIMPLY: Feeling inadequate is like watching everyone laugh at a joke when you don't catch the punchline.

Growing up gay at a Catholic school, I begrudgingly accepted that my dating life would not begin until I started college. For a while, I had been content with passing my teenage years immersed in Young Adult fiction that showed boys my age coming out of the closet and falling in love. But beyond those pages, my chances of embarking on a novel-worthy romance seemed stacked against me.

While my family was exceedingly supportive, society conditioned me into thinking my life was pointless until I had a romance to brag about.

The hours I spent romanticizing about what *could be* only made the fiction inside my head more dangerous. Those fantasies were much sweeter in comparison to the reality I encountered when I began to express myself.

After high school graduation, I looked around and realized I had missed out on a special high school experience, one that could not be found in any class lecture or assembly. Most of my friends and peers had some sort of dating experience, whether it was a cute coffee date or hooking up. Meanwhile, I hadn't even had my first kiss – let alone held hands with another boy.

All I had under my belt was that time a friend from theater camp “accidentally” sent me a nude picture of himself while I was in rehearsal. Not the kind of romance that one writes home about.

In moments of wallowing, I imagined a future of isolation – sitting alone on a park bench, feeding ducks with no one to keep me company until I died alone. While it may sound melodramatic, I felt that if I didn't change myself,

no one would want to be with me. I told myself that the person who has zero dating experience in their 20s is never gonna land a relationship, right?

I decided I needed to bust my ass that summer to catch up to my peers, lest I permanently be the odd man out.

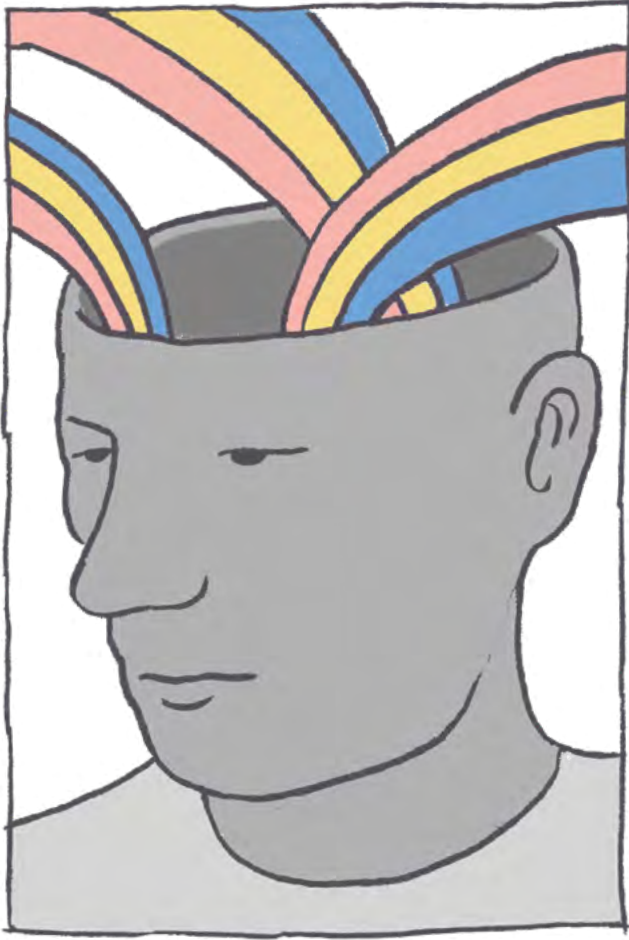
What started with good intentions of finding a nice boy turned into a panicked race to date and have sex which rapidly consumed my life that summer. I did what I thought was natural and signed up for dating apps like Tinder and Grindr. While it may be called online dating, I soon discovered that those platforms offered a version of “dating” I hadn't expected.

You can't really tell your mom and dad about a hookup with a guy who starts the conversation with “u up?”

I entertained visions of being swept away on romantic dates to Paris like Carrie Bradshaw in “Sex and the City,” yet I found myself lying to my family to have second-rate sex in random men's houses and public bathrooms. I must have seemed like a social butterfly, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was slimy and dishonest.

You can't really tell your mom and dad about a hookup with a guy who starts the conversation with “u up?”

Lying and hooking up became second nature, and yet the fact that I couldn't land a serious partner crushed me.



I started to believe that because I am short, or not wild enough, guys were simply not interested in seeing me past an initial hookup.

Inadequacy spread like a virus, and that feeling drove me to perform sexual acts that not only ruined my mental health, but put my sexual health in jeopardy. When someone feels alone and the only outlet to quench that feeling is by hooking up, they will do just about anything without thinking of the consequences.

I soon started to feel like a piece of sushi on a conveyor belt, simply waiting for random men to come and have their pick of me and discard what was left.

As awful as it sounds, it wasn't until I had unprotected sex and faced the fear of contracting HIV that I realized I had to think smarter about how I interacted with men.

There's no shame in hooking up with men online. Let's be clear about that. I would be lying if I said I have completely turned the page on that chapter of my life. I still get horny like everyone else, but now I feel more mature and prepared for casual sex and the current dating culture.

Since hitting what felt like the rock bottom of the dating pool, I started reflecting on the choices I had been making in my life. What started as a quest to find love had quickly turned into a constant charade of lying to my friends and family, which in turn hurt me more than I anticipated. It began to feel like I had been living a double life, where those closest to me didn't know the real me.

It pains me that I willingly put myself into situations that I knew I shouldn't be in, all because I wanted to feel desired by a man. And I'm not alone. When your online feed is littered with random torso pictures, the sense of community starts to deteriorate before your eyes.

It's well-documented, but rarely discussed, that gay men often struggle with loneliness and suffer from depression. Growing up, I saw little representation of LGBTQ+ characters in the media. I was too young to watch "Will & Grace" and shows like "Glee" hardly depicted what life was actually like for gay people.

This issue of insufficient representation is felt by everyone within the LGBTQ+ community. I imagine it's difficult for my straight friends to realize how frustrating romance can become when there are so few accurate depictions of what LGBTQ+ people experience.

Everyone has their fair share of growing pains and awkward sex stories. But the truth is, LGBTQ+ people go through the ringer in romantic relationships because we are often not given the privilege and space to experiment in our teens.

As to what changed in me, it's hard to say. I guess I grew tired of intentionally putting myself in situations where respect and dignity were not on the table. While I still hook up with men, I now speak up for myself, and not to be crude, but I make sure my needs are satisfied, too.

I also have come to embrace the advantages of being alone. Having time by myself can be extremely refreshing, and while I am by no means an introvert, a little solitude and journaling has allowed me to sort out what I need to work on in my life.

Quite plainly, life has more to offer than romance. I now know what to expect when I go on a date and that a hookup is, more often than not, simply a hookup. The unrealistic conquest to find love as soon as possible places immense pressure on our generation, as if there is something wrong with finding your partner in your 30s or 40s, or at any age.

I am only 22, which in the grand scheme of life, is still incredibly young. Now when I dream, I picture a rewarding career, spending time with those I love and traveling to new places. My search for a lover is no longer top priority.

There's more to life than dating and men, and while I still catch feelings here and there, I no longer spend all my time dreaming about relationships.

I guess it just took me a little longer to discover that the person who can truly make me happiest is myself.

Online Exclusives

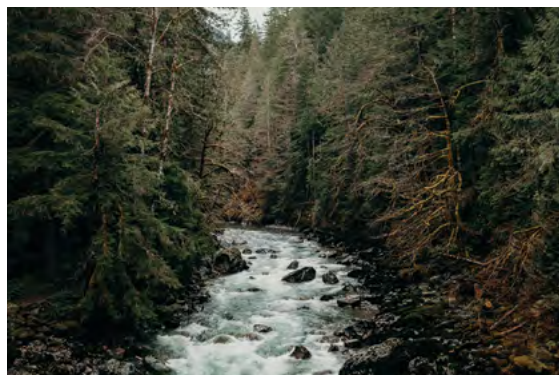
These stories and more available at klipsunmagazine.com

Let's Talk Trash | Audra Anderson



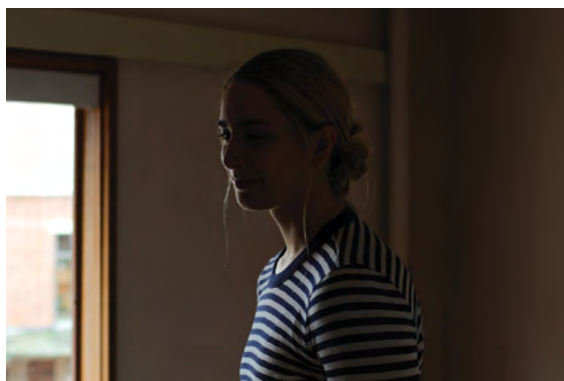
↳ One reporter braved a low-waste week, which involved more digging through university trash cans than she could handle.

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A full-page background image showing a sunset over a body of water. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, purples, and blues, with the sun having set just below the horizon. The water in the foreground is dark blue with gentle, concentric ripples that catch the light from the sunset, creating a shimmering effect. The overall mood is calm and peaceful.

KLIPSUN IS A CHINUK WAWA WORD FOR SUNSET

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